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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HILLAH 000366

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: KARBALA UIA/555 CANDIDATE CONFIDENT OF STRONG PERFORMANCE IN ELECTION

REF: HILLAH 0354, HILLAH 0364

CLASSIFIED BY: ALFRED FONTENEAU, REGIONAL COORDINATOR, REO, AL-HILLAH, STATE.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

1. (C) SUMMARY: The number two candidate on the United Iraqi Alliance list (UIA, ballot number 555) in Karbala, Mowther Hussein Hassan Al-Hakim, expressed optimism over his coalition's chances in the December 15 national election, stating, "My list is in a good position." Al-Hakim, an independent candidate from the Office of Grand Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani, explained that Sistani was not "interfering" in the election or favoring a particular list, but was pushing voters to participate. Regarding the issues that Karbala residents want new National Assembly members to address, Al-Hakim highlighted three areas: security, public services, and "real democracy." END SUMMARY.

2. (C) Al-Hakim, a current member of the Karbala Provincial Council, met with the South Central Regional Coordinator and REO Hillah staff on December 8, and spoke about his candidacy and his coalition's prospects. When asked how he was chosen to be the number two UIA candidate in Karbala, Al-Hakim explained that there are four main constituent groups in the UIA: the Islamic Dawa party, which has two branches, SCIRI (Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq)/Badr Organization, the Sadrists, and the independents. He noted that he is part of the last group, and that the coalition had arranged the "priorities" on the lists.

3. (C) Regarding the restructuring of the UIA since the January election (when it was a broader coalition), Al-Hakim stated that some leaders of small political parties have a "different view." He proclaimed that these leaders believe that they will get more seats as independents. However, according to Al-Hakim, they still have a relationship with the UIA.

4. (C) Al-Hakim declared he was "relaxed" about the election and stated that, "my list is in a good position" when asked how his coalition would fare in the competition for Karbala's six seats in the new assembly. He contended that Iraqis understand the election process, noting that they are "practiced in democracy," having participated in the January 30 and October 15 votes.

5. (C) The Regional Coordinator asked Al-Hakim about the confusion among Iraqis over Sistani's December 3 statement, in which he stated his support for the major Islamic coalitions, which many took as an endorsement of the UIA (NOTE: This interview took place prior to Sistani's December 11 statement, in which he appeared to back away from the position he took on December 3. Refuels. END NOTE.) Al-Hakim responded that Sistani was not interfering, but rather was pressing Iraqis to vote. He added that Sistani does not have a favorite list.

6. (SBU) Al-Hakim indicated that Karbala residents want three things from their representatives in the new National Assembly: security, public services, and "real democracy." He added that his coalition believes in Iraqi unity, women's rights, and improved relations with Iraq's neighbors and the international community, noting that he and his colleagues do not want to be "closed off from the outside world."

7. (SBU) Al-Hakim argued that the six seats allotted to Karbala in the new National Assembly are insufficient given the province's population. (NOTE: The IEI allocated seats on the number of Public Distribution System ration cards in each province, which is in turn based on population. END NOTE). Al-Hakim maintained that the population count for Karbala was artificially low because the last census was performed during Saddam Hussein's reign. He stated that during Saddam's time, some people were unwilling to give their names during the census because they believed it would get them called for service in the Army. In addition, according to Al-Hakim, Saddam's government purposely used a lower figure for Karbala's population so that the province would receive fewer public services, due to the fact that residents stood against Saddam.

8. (SBU) While discussing the new Iraqi Constitution, Al-Hakim described human rights as a "holy issue" and noted that "democracy is a holy thing." When asked if he foresaw changes to the constitution in the new National Assembly, Al-Hakim responded that he expected some changes -- and that fifty

articles remain for the new National Assembly to discuss -- but he hoped that these would not impact the core of the constitution, which he said is people's freedom.

¶9. (SBU) BIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION: Mouthar Hussein Hassan Al-Hakim is in his 40s or 50s. He served as Karbala Provincial Governor for three to four weeks under the CPA in 2003 or 2004. Al-Hakim is an independent candidate from the Office of Sistani.

He is a current member of Karbala Provincial Council (PC) and the head of the PC's Reconstruction Committee, but is not active in either. He is considered pious and is a descendant of Mohammed, although he did not wear a black turban, indicating descent from the prophet, during his meeting with REO staff. He spends some of his time working in the twin shrines in downtown Karbala, which are Sistani-affiliated.

¶10. (C) COMMENT: As the number two for the UIA -- the largest and best known Shi'a Islamist coalition list -- in one of the most devoutly religious provinces in Iraq, Al-Hakim is virtually assured of a seat in the new National Assembly. His comment about small parties that have split away from the UIA since the January election maintaining links to the UIA suggests opportunities for post-election coalition building during negotiations over key positions in the new government. END COMMENT.

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